

PETITION
OF
CITIZENS OF OREGON,

PRAYING

That the laws of the United States may be extended over that Territory, &c.

MAY 8, 1848.

Ordered to be printed.

The petition of the free citizens of the United States resident in Oregon, through their delegates in convention assembled at the Falls of the Yamhill river, in Oregon Territory, on the second day of October, in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and forty seven, to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled:

Your petitioners, in full view of the allegiance and respect they owe the government of their country, and impelled by a deep sense of the neglect and injuries they have suffered, would most respectfully call the candid and serious attention of your honorable body to our unprotected and neglected situation. We would not trouble the legislative councils of our country, already so much occupied with the cares and responsibilities incident to the government of a great and free people, upon a trifling occasion, or for light and trivial causes. But we know ourselves to be civilized men—true, free, and honest American citizens—united and bound to our beloved country by the indissoluble ties of admiration, duty, and kindred; and as such, in all candor and sincerity, we do claim the rights that belong to us in common with our more fortunate fellow-citizens east of the Rocky mountains; and which rights, having been first purchased by the blood and treasure of our hallowed ancestors, were by them bequeathed to us, as well as to others. We know that we enjoyed all the rights, privileges, and immunities of American citizens while we resided in the bosom of our country, and in the places of our nativity; and we cannot conceive why we should have forfeited those rights for the sole, solitary reason that we have changed our residence, and are now nearly four thousand miles from the seat of government, but still upon American soil, *though not under American law*. We did not quit the graves of our ancestors and the homes of our childhood, nor tear ourselves asunder from friends, kindred, and country, and traverse, with our wives and children, wild and unpeopled districts, to reach this fair and beautiful country, for mercenary motives of plunder, robbery, or oppression. Among the few things that

the limited capacity of man can know with certainty, are the honest intentions of his own heart; and when we say that we were impelled by no unholy motive in planting ourselves among the wild mountains, valleys, and streams of Oregon, we know we speak the simple, the unvarnished truth. And we beg leave, most respectfully, to entreat the candid attention of your honorable body to a very short and concise statement of *only a few* of the more prominent facts *apparent* upon the page of the history of our settlement here. We came hither with the laudable view of not only improving our condition in the world, and of providing homes for ourselves and our children, but we were animated with the belief that we could essentially aid our country in sustaining her rights to the soil upon which we settled, and in bringing to a satisfactory close a long protracted and harassing controversy with a mighty foreign power, in reference to the boundaries of Oregon. We believed that in settling in this far-off region, we were extending and enlarging the "area of freedom;" and by planting civilization, liberty, and christianity upon the shores of the great Pacific, we should render a lasting benefit to mankind; and that from this point those blessings might ultimately flow across the wide ocean, to waken up and bless the enslaved and slumbering myriads of other lands. It was this desire to lead in this peaceful and laudable crusade, that mainly brought us hither.

When we reached this distant shore, we found ourselves in a country new and uncultivated, subject to the privations and hardships common to all new settlements, isolated from the balance of the civilized world, and two thousand miles from the inhabited borders of the country we had left, with a vast region, traversed by wild and roaming savages, intervening between us and the government to which we owed an allegiance. We did not emigrate to Oregon with the intent or wish to expatriate ourselves from our country. We would never have given up our citizenship even for homes in Oregon. We found ourselves placed under very embarrassing circumstances. We were here in the midst of an Indian population, whose jealousies were daily excited and augmented by the extension of our settlements, and whose predatory habits and thievish propensities have been the source of continual annoyance and irritation; and besides this, we were here among the subjects of Great Britain, at a time when the greatest excitement existed in regard to the Oregon controversy; and we were not only here under all these embarrassing circumstances, but we were here *without law to govern us, or an arm to protect us*. Although from year to year we fondly hoped to see the paternal care of our government extended to us, that we might once more live under its just and equitable laws, we were as often doomed to disappointment. Embarrassed as we were, and finding by actual experiment that a resident and civilized people could not exist without government of some kind, however imperfect, we were forced, as a community, to organize a temporary system of laws for the preservation of peace and order. Whatever civilized people may hereafter be compelled to try the unhappy experiment, will find, as we have done, this truth undeniable, that no civilized race of men can possibly exist, as such, without government. Even a despotism is better than no government at all. In organizing and putting in operation our plans of temporary government, we were met by, and had to overcome, great and serious difficulties. That it is, *with even the same means*, much more difficult to administer a mere temporary system of

laws, where all is new and fluctuating, than a regular and permanent one, is a truth so sensible and apparent as not to need illustration. No people can, or will, be contented and happy under a government where all is painful suspense and uncertainty.

But, independent of the difficulties incident to the establishment and operation of a mere temporary system, we had other obstacles to surmount. Our people were just arrived in a new and uncultivated country, with very slender pecuniary means, and were scattered over a great extent of country, in very sparse settlements, remote from each other and from places of business, and were, under the circumstances, compelled to give their utmost attention to supply the most pressing demands of nature. We had roads to open, bridges to erect, forests to fell, fields to cultivate, and school-houses and churches to put up. With the utmost revenue we could raise, we were not able to pay our officers a fair compensation; and our Legislative Assembly could only sit about two weeks at a time, for the want of means to pay the members. We were compelled to adopt the statute laws of Iowa, passed at the first session of its Legislative Assembly, unsuited as they were to our condition, and modified by a few of our own local acts. We had no printing press in Oregon, and no books or authorities to refer to, and only two copies of the Iowa statutes in the Territory. We had no means of making known to the people what our laws were, until the Oregon Spectator was established, and then we could only publish our local acts through the medium of its columns.

Under all these untoward circumstances, and many others, of which we spare ourselves the pain of reciting, we held on our course, and sustained our temporary government, thus preserving order and peace in our new community. Our course and policy towards the aborigines of the country have been humane and peaceful, and we have borne and forborne much. We have preserved peace and amicable relations with the subjects of Great Britain, and we are not conscious of having done any act that would involve our country or embarrass its negotiations, or bring disgrace upon ourselves, or upon the American name. We honestly thought that a fair and candid consideration of our conduct would award us the praise of having done well. We supposed we had acted well—had done nobly. We indeed felt grieved that our country had not extended to us that protection which British subjects enjoyed in our very midst. But we were comforted with the reflection, that such failure had its origin in a sacred regard which our government had to its solemn treaty stipulations.

At length, however, the news of the late treaty between the United States and Great Britain, settling the whole Oregon controversy, reached us; and all obstacles being thus removed, we fondly, and without doubt, expected the speedy extension of the jurisdiction and laws of our country over Oregon. But they came not. The sorrowful news reached us by the late immigration, that Congress had adjourned and nothing had been done for Oregon; and our hearts sank within us. "Has our country forgotten and abandoned us?" might be heard from the lips of all. It was not so much the fact that we were here surrounded by perilous circumstances, with restless tribes of Indians demanding pay for their lands, which we had neither the means nor the right to give, but it was the reflection that our country had always been scrupulously just in the observance of all her engagements with foreign nations, and that her laws had

speedily followed her citizens wherever they trod American soil, and her protection when they journeyed in other lands; and that we, a *small, distant, and poor community* of few citizens in Oregon, should be the *sole, solitary* victims of our country's neglect and injustice—it was *this* that pierced us to the heart.

Perhaps we are wanting in due respect to the constituted authorities of our government, when we speak in frank and honest terms of what we, in the sincerity of our hearts, think neglect and injustice. We are plain, honest men, and speak what we say in a spirit of no disrespect. Far be it from us to address the legislative or any other department of our government in any other than terms of the most sincere respect; and if we have done otherwise upon this occasion, we deeply regret it. We have acted under the firm conviction that there exists a mutual duty between our government and all its citizens; and that, while we owe and observe a most willing allegiance towards the United States, we have a right to claim their protection and care. Our forefathers complained that they were oppressed by the mother country, and they had a just right to complain. We do not complain of oppression, but of *neglect*. Even the tyrant has his moments of relaxation and kindness, but neglect never wears a smile.

In conclusion, we would most respectfully call the serious attention of your honorable body to the situation and painful condition of the people of Oregon. Aside from that public and individual unhappiness that necessarily belongs to a state of suspense and uncertainty, and that accompanies the prostration and suspension of business and enterprise; that cuts off improvement, and causes us to stand still, our relations with the various surrounding Indian tribes, and those in our midst, are daily becoming more and more difficult. The Indians in Oregon have heretofore been pacified with repeated assurances given from time to time that the United States would send agents, authorized and empowered to treat with them in relation to their claims to the soil of the country. These promises have been repeated so often, without being fulfilled, that the Indians have become exceedingly restless, distrustful and jealous. They say, with great apparent reason, that their numbers are diminishing rapidly; that they are growing old, and will soon pass away, without receiving any compensation for their lands; and your petitioners cannot but look with sympathy upon a doomed race of men rapidly sinking away in the midst of peace, and not by the hand of violence. We cannot tell when we may become involved in a general Indian war, accompanied with the usual evils attending such a war, but aggravated by the fact that our fellow-citizens who may be emigrating to Oregon might be intercepted and entirely cut off. We are here and see the growing evil daily, but we have no *power or right to treat with the Indian tribes*, nor means to pay them should we make a treaty. We are also placed in a very difficult position with reference to our criminal laws. We have no prisons, and no means of punishing many offences, unless we retrograde to the times of the branding iron, the cropping knife, and the whipping post; and this would be revolting to the moral sense of our community. It is all we can do, under a system of taxation as high as in any of the States, to pay our officers the most meagre salaries, and to carry on our government at all.

Your petitioners would also pray your honorable body to pass an act making liberal grants of land to the settlers in Oregon. We came hither

believing that such grants would be made. We have suffered much, endured much, and we sincerely think that by our settlement in Oregon we contributed in no small degree to the settlement of that long pending controversy which at one time threatened the peace of the world. But, first and above all, we pray your honorable body to extend over us and our new homes the protection of our great, free, and happy country. This is an event most ardently desired by your petitioners. We hope once more to live under the flag and laws of our country. We hold ourselves ready and most willing, nay anxious, to do our duty towards our country, when, and where, and how she may demand it. We are not aliens from her: her neglect has not driven us away. Can we forget the "stars and stripes?" If she will still neglect us, we must love and obey her still. We cannot forget our origin, and we cannot, and will not, drive from our hearts the love of our country. Our names, our hearts, and our destinies, are connected with the great republic. We are few and far off, but we are true American citizens. We ask our country to do us justice—to forget and abandon us not, in our helplessness and our weakness. We have honestly endeavored to do our duty, and we thought we had succeeded. We think we merit the respectful consideration of our government. It is with our country whether she will hear us or not.

And now the undersigned, a majority of a committee appointed by the aforesaid convention to draw up this petition, invoking upon your honorable body the protection and guidance of the Eternal Deity, would submit most respectfully the cause of the people of Oregon to your magnanimity and justice.

PETER H. BURNETT.

GEO. L. CURRY.

L. A. RICE.

This petition is also signed by the following citizens:

Hezekiah Johnson,
A. Lawrence Lovejoy,
P. G. Stewart,
T. Wm. Hofius,
Andrew Hood,
John Fleming,
Wm. P. Hudson,
Albert Priest,
J. M. Wair,
C. Wheeler,
James M. Goewey,
T. A. Brown,
Thomas Purves,
John F. Winkley,
Hiram Straight,
Wm. McCurd,
Wm. Holmes,
Adam Tuedge,
R. B. Howard,
William H. Berry,
A Van Dusen,
[Illegible.]
Thomas Hood,

Felix E. Whittenberg,
H. B. Flournoy,
Jehu Scudder,
Carlos W. Shane, of Cincinnati,
Amon Butler,
Samuel Parker,
James Farrier,
John H. Bosworth,
John D. Crawford,
Andrew J. Thomas,
John H. Couch, Oregon city,
Thomas H. Smith, Oakland,
John P. Brooks, Lucker Creek,
John Perkins, Yamhill,
Jos. M. Wyatt,
Hiram Wilber,
H. H. Sargent,
Joseph Church,
Geo. C. Lawton, Massachusetts.
Medorem Crowford,
J. H. McMillen,
O. S. Thomas,
Rush Mendenhall,

D. H. Good,
 J. P. Ward,
 William Oleby,
 Jackson Plummer,
 R. K. Childers,
 Isom Cranfill,
 R. B. Chrisman,
 A. P. Caldwell,
 Henry Williamson,
 Chesley B. Gray,
 Thomas Norriss,
 John N. Donnel,
 Robert Moore,
 Matthew C. Dill,
 Noyes Smith,
 J. R. Robb,
 B. B. Rogers,
 E. B. Magruder,
 W. P. Dougherty,
 A. R. T. Locey,
 M. M. McCarver,
 C. D. Sackett,
 Samuel R. Thurston,
 S. S. White,
 J. H. Brattain,
 Geo. W. Walling,
 Peter Scholl,
 James Winston,
 R. R. Thompson,
 Chas. F. Putnam,
 Joseph Kelly,
 Cyrus Sitney,
 James Low,
 John S. Thomas,
 J. D. Holman,

John Visinent,
 John Hoard,
 Angus McDonald,
 A. Saunders,
 A. Morris,
 J. Hall,
 W. H. Ruse,
 James Cooper,
 William Case,
 M. Lafromboise,
 Nathl. Crosby, jr., Portland,
 Edwin W. Cley,
 Fleming Hill,
 R. K. Payne,
 Samuel N. Vane,
 R. Haines,
 Richard C. Combs,
 E. B. Comfort,
 A. F. Hedges,
 Walter Pomeroy,
 John B. Price,
 Robert Newell,
 David McLoughlin,
 Robert Birnie,
 David Western,
 F. X. Mathew,
 B. Laplant,
 C. Rondo,
 Samuel Newman,
 Thomas T. Eyre,
 John McClosky,
 G. W. Bell,
 James McCormick,
 H. C. Buckingham,
 F. W. Pettygrove.

